



Lesson one: Introduction to communication aids

Communication aids are a term used to describe the communication assistive products included on TAP.

Communication aids assist people to:

- Get their message across when speech is difficult or not easily understood
- Understand the speech of other people.

A communication partner may also use a communication aid to assist them to be better understood.

Speech and language

It is important to understand the difference between speech and language when providing communication aids.

- Speech is the sound you make when talking. It includes how clearly you say words, your voice, and how the words sound when you speak them.
- Language is about understanding and using words. It includes how you remember, organize and use words to get your message across and understand other people.

People who benefit from communication aids

People who benefit from communication aids include:

- Children who have not developed language and find it difficult to say and use words.
- Adults who have lost or are losing language and have difficulty using words to communicate. They may have only a few words that are useful for communication.
- Adults and children with good language who understand what others say and know what they want to say. However, they have no speech, or their speech is not clear, and others have difficulty understanding them.
- Adults and children with good language who can speak clearly in some situations. However, in other situations they are not able to speak. For example, when feeling anxious.

Communication boards included on TAP

On TAP a communication board uses alphabet vocabulary and is called an alphabet board.

An alphabet board has no limit to what a person can say, if they can spell it. It is simple to learn if the person already knows the alphabet. It is also easy to create and personalize.

Different alphabets	Low density alphabet board	High density alphabet board

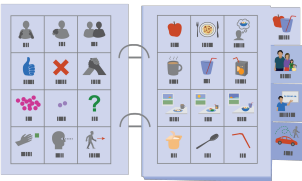
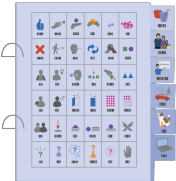
Using an alphabet board requires patience and effort. Spelling out words and phrases takes time and can be tiring.

Warning: Communication only works if both people understand. To use an alphabet board, the person's main communication partner/s must be able to read the words or phrases they are spelling.

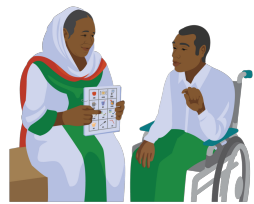
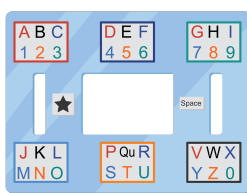
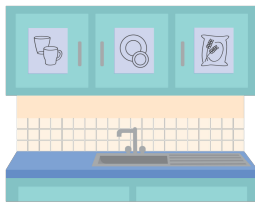
Communication books included on TAP

A communication book is a collection of pages that contain picture symbols to support or replace speech. Communication books are organized into a first page (top page) with topic pages. The top page is also printed on the back of each topic page. This means it is available when a person has the book open at any topic.

Communication books can be quicker to use than spelling out words and can be understood by communication partners who cannot read.

Low density communication book	High density communication book	Core words top page	Conversation support top page
			

Communication books and boards not included on TAP

Partner assisted scanning	E-tran (eye transfer) frame	Environment supports
		
Used if person has difficulties with vision or movement.	Used with eye pointing.	Text or symbols placed on signs, doors or equipment.

Vocabulary layouts

Vocabulary layouts on TAP:

- Alphabet layout:** alphabet is printed on one side or divided over both sides of paper on an alphabet board.
- Symbol layout:** symbols are small pictures that represent words or phrases. When used on a communication aid each symbol has a text label to identify its meaning.

Chair	Fish
	
Like	Help
	

Some words and phrases can be more easily recognized than others. Symbols that look like what they mean mostly represent people, objects or places. This makes them easier to learn. However, these represent words which are used less often in our daily language compared to other words.

Words that are used often in different situations, such as “I”, “want”, “go”, “help” are called **core words**. Core words are very useful and can be used to get many different messages across. However, they are often difficult to represent with symbols that look like what they mean and rely on a communication partner to read the text label to understand what they mean.

Symbols credit: © ARASAAC

Lesson two: Step one: Select

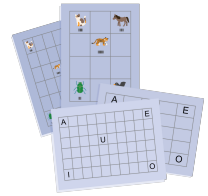
The first step in providing a communication book or board is to assess a person’s needs to select the most suitable communication aid for them. Information from the assessment will help you to plan:

- How the person will use their communication aid
- What to teach the person
- If referral to another service is needed.

Before the assessment, explain to the family member/caregiver that at least one person who knows the person well and communicates with them regularly should attend.

You will need to prepare:

- A selection of assessment boards (alphabet and symbol layout in low and high density)
- Sample alphabet boards (single and double page layout)
- Selection of topic pages (in selected language and high and low density layout).



Assessment interview

Find a quiet, private space to sit with the person and their communication partner/s and explain the assessment. Discuss and decide with the person and their communication partner what their communication priorities are.

- Ask the person what the most important things are that they find difficult to communicate.
- Ask their communication partner what they most need to understand.

If the person has difficulty answering questions during the assessment, or you have difficulty understanding what the person is saying, ask their communication partner to assist.

Ability to use communication books and boards

Based on the answers to the interview questions about reading, spelling and language, use either alphabet or symbol assessment boards to assess a person's vision and movement abilities. If the person has near vision spectacles, ask them to wear them.

Vision:

- Check the person's ability to see letters or symbols.
- Place the high density board within the person's reach. If they cannot see the letters or symbols, move on to the low density board. Record which density board the person can see and continue to check their movement abilities.
- If the person cannot see the high or low density assessment board they have more complex needs. Stop the assessment and with their permission  refer to a communication service and discuss  referral to an eye health professional.

Movement:

- Check the person's ability to point accurately.
- Place the board selected when checking vision within the person's reach. Check if the person can point to a symbol or letter in all four corners and in the centre of the board. Check the high and low density board. If the person can both see and point to an assessment board, a communication book or board may be suitable.
- If the person cannot successfully point to both boards, stop the assessment.  Refer to communication service.

Tip: The person may also have difficulty pointing if they cannot sit without support. If the person has difficulty sitting without support  refer to a rehabilitation service.

If person does not participate at any point while checking their abilities → Continue to provide without checking ability.

Provide without checking ability: some people may not take part in checking their abilities or they might point to just one or two symbols and then stop. This is not unusual when introducing a communication aid for the first time. Instead, work with their communication partner to select the communication book with the smallest size symbols or letters that they think the person can see and touch accurately.

Plan

Use the information gathered during assessment to make a plan with the person and their communication partner.

Decide together if the person may benefit from:

- A new communication aid
- Using their current communication aid with any adjustments or repairs needed
- Being taught how to use their communication aid
- A referral to other services
- A follow up appointment.

Select the type of communication aid and vocabulary, layout (high or low density), top page (core or conversation support) and list the selected topics. Topics are selected during Step two: Fit.

Refer to a communication service if a person has difficulty:

- Seeing symbols or letters on a low density board
- Pointing clearly to symbols or letters on a low density board

The person may have other needs identified during the assessment.

- If the person has difficulty seeing the low density board discuss  referral to an eye health professional.
- If the person has difficulty sitting up without support discuss  referral to a rehabilitation service.

Lesson three: Step two: Fit

The second step in providing a communication aid is to fit the product to match the person's needs. This includes preparing and trialling the communication aid.

Equipment

To prepare a communication book or board you will need:

- Printer with black and colour ink and paper
- Laminator and laminating sheets
- Permanent pen, scissors, hole punch, paper fasteners.

Alphabet board: print alphabet page/s and add additional phrases on the back.

Communication book: select topics together (maximum 8 for low density book or 12 for high density book), print topic and top pages and assemble.

The topics available depend on what has been translated into the person's language and/or adapted to suit their background and preferences. Each topic page is available in a low and high density version.

Tip: On TAP the topics and top pages are accessed online through the TAP page on the Global Symbols website:

Product check

After setting up the communication book or board, check the product is safe and ready to use.

Check pages:

- Are clean
- Have no sign of damage or tears
- Have no sharp corners
- Turn easily.

Trial communication aid

To trial a communication book or board, start by checking the person's ability to use it and try having a conversation.

Check person's ability to:

- Point accurately at letters or symbols
- Turn the alphabet board or topic pages in the communication book.

Try having a conversation:

Place the board or book in a position where the person can see and reach it and try having a conversation. Choose a preferred communication topic or activity and try to engage in conversation with the person. If a person is trialling a communication book, start modelling how to use the book.

Lesson four: Step three: Use

The third step in providing a communication book or board is to teach the person how to use and take care of the product.

Explain that it takes time and practice for the person and their communication partner to use a communication aid. A person may not participate in using it immediately. This does not mean they will not benefit.

Alphabet boards

Show the person and their communication partner the:

- Alphabet and numbers
- “Turn to phrases” instruction
- Phrases.

Ask if there are any important phrases they would like to add. Suggest they type a message. Encourage the person and their communication partner to have a conversation.

Communication books

A person learns how to use their communication book through modelling. Point to the symbol while saying the most important word or words in each sentence. For example: Point to “toilet” when asking “do you need the **toilet**?”

This helps the person link the symbol to the word and understand how to use it. Once they start to understand the use of the symbol you can include more symbols. For example, point to “you” and “need” and “toilet” when asking “Do **you** need the **toilet**?”

Warning: Do not tell the person to point to a symbol or hold their hand to help them to point to a symbol. Their communication should always be their own choice.

Communication breakdowns

We all experience communication breakdowns. This may happen when we say something and our communication partner responds with something that does not fit with what we just said.

Communication breakdowns happen more frequently for people who use communication aids. When a communication breakdown happens, you can both use other ways to communicate to get your message across such as pointing, gestures, drawing.

The conversation support topic contains some useful words and phrases to help repair communication breakdowns. These include phrases such as: “Ask me yes/no questions” or “Start again”.

How to look after a communication book or board

To take care of a communication aid:

- **Clean regularly:** wipe pages gently using mild soapy water and a damp cloth. Avoid soaking pages.
- **Check regularly:** for torn or damaged pages and missing or broken fasteners.
- **Maintain:** tell the person who they can contact if they need to replace pages or have problems with their product.

Lesson five: Step four: Follow up

The fourth step in providing a communication aid is to make sure that the product still meets the person’s needs and is in good working order. Follow up should be done for all people who are provided with a communication aid.

Early follow up is advised at two weeks and two months to support a person and their communication partner to adjust to using their communication aid. Further follow up is recommended each year.

Follow up might be done more regularly if the person’s communication needs are changing quickly.

If the person is not using their communication aid or has problems using it, it is important to find out why. You can try to find a solution together.

If the person is using an alphabet board:

- Observe the person and their communication partner having a conversation or jointly participating in an activity.
- If the person is finding it too tiring or slow to use an alphabet board, they may want to consider a communication book. In this situation, carry out another assessment focusing on communication books.

If the person is using a communication book:

- Observe the person and their communication partner having a conversation or jointly participating in an activity.
- If necessary, repeat the teaching you provided on modelling.
- A person using a communication book usually requires a lot of modelling from as many communication partners as possible to support them to learn the vocabulary and start using it. It can take many months for people to start responding, even when modelling is being used correctly.

If a person continues to have difficulty using their communication aid after follow up, with their permission  refer to a communication service.

Check vocabulary

As children grow up, their vocabulary needs and activities may change. Check if the selected topics and vocabulary are still meeting their needs.

Some people will make progress and want more vocabulary. Electronic communication aids offer a wider range of words and topics. Consider if an electronic communication aid could be suitable.

If their communication book needs expanding beyond the standard vocabulary,  refer to a communication service.